

VZCZCXRO6867
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHDK #0416/01 0911517
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 011517Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2162
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DAKAR 000416

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL AND INR/AA
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [ENRG](#) [EINV](#) [BTIO](#) [KNNP](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: Senegal-Ambassador meets the Minister of Renewable Energy

DAKAR 00000416 001.2 OF 002

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) On March 30, Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Christian Sina Diatta, the Minister of Biofuels, Renewable Energy and Scientific Research, to discuss alternative energy possibilities and nuclear power in Senegal. End Summary

Downbeat

2. (SBU) Minister Diatta is a mathematician by education and has a solid reputation for being well versed in the portfolio for which his Ministry is responsible. During the meeting he underlined that his Ministry was considering every type of alternative energy possible in order to increase Senegal's energy output, which is currently well below demand. However, the Minister was decidedly downbeat about the prospect of using alternative technologies in Senegal citing, the high cost of importing solar panels, weak and seasonal winds off Senegal's coast and unstable undersea currents. Furthermore, the Minister pointed out that even if Senegal was able to produce more energy, the electricity grid is so out of date that it could not efficiently carry the extra load. According to the Minister, the grid dates from the colonial era, wryly adding, "As do the laws governing the electricity sector."

Nuclear Power

3. (SBU) Emphasizing that Senegal was party to all nuclear power and proliferation-related conventions, the Minister had no illusions that even if they started today it would be at least 15 years before a civilian nuclear power station could be built in Senegal, or anywhere in Africa: "We can't just set up a plant tomorrow. We need to reach milestones in the process first. We need to set up the knowledge base, train people, pass laws, and establish oversight bodies. That being said smaller countries than us have nuclear power, so why not?" Diatta noted that Senegal already has a law on nuclear security, noting this was an absolute prerequisite for considering building a nuclear power plant. Reminding that Senegal had already discussed this possibility with France, the Minister said Senegal wanted to work with a nuclear power on such a project.

Internal Warfare

4. (SBU) Picked in order to satisfy the need to have both ethnic and religious diversity in the Cabinet, according to observers, Minister Diatta is a competent Minister with little real power, especially in his own energy field, and he knows it. (Note: Diatta is Catholic and a member of the Jolla ethnic group from the Casamance region of southern Senegal.) The real power lies with the Minister of Energy, Samuel Sarr, who also controls Senegal's electricity parasatal, Senelec. The Minister said that his office had drafted two laws on

the use of alternative energy in Senegal, but that both laws had yet to make their way through the Cabinet, "The national refinery company SAR, would feel threatened by such a project as bio-fuels, as would Senelec" he explained.

U.S.-Brazil Biofuels Cooperation

15. (SBU) Now that Senegal is part of the second tranche of countries in the U.S.-Brazil Biofuels Cooperation initiative, the Minister asked the U.S. to "close the triangle" by having American technical experts come to Senegal to work with his Ministry on planting and managing a biofuel crop like jatropha, "Senegal has plenty of land available that is currently being unused for any agricultural productivity," he asserted. We would welcome companies that would be willing to invest in setting up a jatropha growing operation here so that we can produce biodiesel. Even if we can't convert our own power plants to use biodiesel we can become exporters of green energy." In answer to a question concerning the U.S. company Energy Allied, which is already working in this field in Senegal, the Minister was very dismissive and accused the company of being arrogant in the way it treated the government. Having failed to present at least one project to his Ministry, Diatta warned that "They are falling behind other companies already here."

Comment

16. (SBU) After having successfully defended his party's candidates in the Casamance region in the recently concluded local elections, Minister Diatta should keep his Cabinet seat. The Minister is a knowledgeable interlocutor and is keen to work with the United States on a variety of alternative energy possibilities for Senegal. The Minister is also fully aware that he will need to find projects that win the backing of President Abdoulaye Wade in order to trump

DAKAR 00000416 002.2 OF 002

Senegal's current energy providers. End Comment